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THE END AND THE BEGINNING

IN all things, we well know, we are unequal to the events of this hour. Not only cannot we express what we feel; we cannot even feel what we would express. We are dazed spectators of that which but lately we thought we ourselves were doing. We watch the will working in the world, and know now that it is not our will. For four years we have talked of the moral law and trusted in it with more or less of faith. We spoke of it to each other, so that we might still believe in it, while again and again it did not seem to work. Only we worked, in a universe indifferent to our labour and faith. Unaided we fought against an enemy who seemed to understand the nature of the universe better than we did; who said that all force was material and had harnessed the material force of things to his own mechanism. There were times, even, when to our faithlessness the whole struggle became squalid and meaningless, a struggle of animals with dreams against animals that had learnt not to dream. Our enemies had at least the logic and virtue of their dreadful creed. They were swift, implacable, free of pretence to themselves, using it only to conquer others, beasts of prey with the beast's beauty of power, and sure to prevail in a universe of prey, because they had used wisdom of man to discover its nature. Such were the doubts that afflicted even the bravest, and them most of all. For only the bravest dare express their doubts to themselves, dare face them and so conquer them. Again and again they have conquered them with no sign of help from outside, with some hindrance even from within. War is a physical struggle, and in it neither men nor nations

can bear themselves always with dignity and beauty. There is an animal side to every conflict, and it is easy for those of little faith to believe that the conflict is all animal.

Again and again, too, fortune seemed to favour the enemy; again and again we were disappointed as if by some malignity more powerful than theirs. The freedom of Russia became a worse slavery and threatened slavery to the world. It encouraged those who, in their feeble malice, are always eager to whisper that a democracy cannot wage war against an autocracy. And there were those too who, with a malice no less feeble, whispered that, being at war, we were equal in wickedness with our enemy, that we could not expect help either from God or from that faith of ours which they laboured to destroy. Reactionary and pacifist, each in his own way conspired against our faith. Yet the mass of our people, blindly as it seemed, kept their faith against both, and even against the fools who told us that all went well when it did not. We kept our faith against the lies we told ourselves and the facts that so soon confuted them. But for almost four years it was a faith that often seemed irrational.

And then, suddenly, the working of the moral law was revealed in actual fact. There came a moment—we can put our finger on the very day—when the enemy's strength seemed to wither. Still we asked where he would strike next, but he never struck again; he could but parry our blows more and more feebly. Then, no less suddenly, the whole fabric of Central Europe crumbled. What had never happened before in the history of war happened now.

Not army after army, but nation after nation, surrendered; until at last the nation most powerful in arms of any that the world had ever seen surrendered too, utterly spent because it had trained itself to exert all its power. And now we see that the moral law has worked the more completely because it has been so long in working. It is they who have punished themselves; their very cunning, the cunning of man at the service of the beast of prey, is proved to be a folly unparalleled. The climax of their power, of their cunning, of their foolishness, was the peace of Brest-Litovsk. That inhuman wickedness gave to their enemies a resolution more than human. It was their utter trust in force, then finally affirmed, which imposed on us the last victorious force and unity. And, since to them force was everything, they were doomed to spend their force utterly and to be left with nothing. And now suddenly all their belief in their own autocracy, because of its power, is shattered. Now it is proved to all the world, and to all history, that the power and the glory alike are with democracy. The French and ourselves went into the war expecting error and folly in our Governments, for we knew that our Governments were made up of men like ourselves; and, when there was error and folly, we were not dismayed or even very angry. But the Germans had been taught that their rulers could not make mistakes; they had given up their freedom to that infallibility; and when it was proved most fallible, indeed, almost insane in its blindness, they had nothing in which they could put their trust.

Everywhere democracy has stood the test and autocracy has broken under it. Never has a nation been more tried than the French Republic, and the French Republic stands; the English people stand, as free as in peace time and with a greater

passion for freedom than ever before. The end has not come as we expected, with a Waterloo or a Sedan. The armour of Germany still clothes her, dented but not broken; but the spirit and flesh within are spent, and the Waterloo is prevented by surrender. Some may be disappointed by the manner of her defeat. It has been said again and again that the Germans would lose their faith in their militarism only if they were utterly defeated in the field. But nothing could destroy that faith so utterly as this defeat, not of an army alone but of a nation. Again and again they have won victories, but each new victory made them new enemies and heartened the old ones, because the war was not merely against their armies; it was a conflict not of wills so much as of faiths.

They have lost because their very power enlisted the world against them. They may still tell themselves the lie that they were invincible in the field; but they know that the stars in their courses fought against them, and will fight against any who do the like again. They know that their hope can be no longer in their armour, for they have sunk under the weight of it. It must be in penitence, a change of heart, the forgiveness of all mankind whom they despised.

But this is no time for jeers or insolent triumph. If there were no nobler reason, we have suffered too much to laugh in our victory. They must pay the price, not because we wish for vengeance, but in justice to those whom they have wronged. But justice does not gibe at the criminal, even when it is his enemy who has become his judge. We can prove that we have borne the sword of God only if now we hold the scales of His justice. The Divine process has chosen us for its instruments, the power we wield is greater than our own, and we must not profane it with any

unseemliness of conduct or speech. It is France, America, England, Italy that will sit in judgment, not mere individual men; and we must prove that these words, and the images they mean for us, are not mere figments of vanity but true forms of the spirit. There must be a conference of spirits all noble and touched to finer issues. And Germany too must come, as a spirit fallen but not despaired of, a sister still who has to regain her sisterhood, to purge herself of her madness, to recover that innocence of the past when men listened to her music and her wisdom and smiled at a childishness in her which they loved.

It is more true of nations even than of men that they are not utterly tied and bound to their past. They can escape from it by repentance and reparation. And the parable of the Prodigal Son tells us that repentance is repentance still, even when it is forced. He did not think of repentance until he was eating husks among the swine. It was hunger that made him cry, "I will arise and go to my father." Yet his father forgave him and never asked why he had repented. True, we are not God who can forgive all wrongs done to Himself merely with the motion of His Divine mind. We need reparation out of justice to those who have been wronged, and the evil that man does to man cannot be unthought by a change of heart. It is there, and the only proof of repentance is to make amends for it. In this case, too, the amends are forced, because there is no other means of obtaining them. But we need not hinder the penitence that may follow with useless bitterness. It is not suffering that we desire for its own sake. We would not exact one pang more of it, even from our enemies, after all that has been suffered through their madness.

But for one or two unhappy phrases, there are both dignity and signs of re-

pentance in the message of Chancellor Max to the Germans out of Germany. He should not have spoken of the hatred and malicious rejoicing that surround them. It is not malice that makes the world rejoice at the fall of Germany, but the fact that, with that fall, an idol has fallen and a fear has been lifted from the hearts of all the weak. Let us turn from those words of his to these: "Germany has conquered herself and her belief in the justice of might." True, she has still to prove it, and must prove it in action. We cannot now forget how often she has made herself a gramophone for the lies which her rulers wished to tell. She will not in a moment cure herself of the habit of repeating whatever formula seems to suit her purpose best. But that was a habit of her power and that strange arrogance of hers in which there was so little pride. She could always stoop to conquer, but now she is stooping so that she may not be utterly destroyed. Her conversion, if it comes at all, will come through her defeat, and it may seem that a conversion so brought about is worth little. It is only the loss of her might that has destroyed her belief in the justice of it. True; but have we never learnt anything from adversity when, from the hardness of our hearts, we would not learn it in prosperity? It is the very wisdom of the British nation, and the secret of its long-maintained power, to learn quickly from adversity. The Germans, with their pedantry, are slower to accept its lessons, but they must accept them now. And this learning from adversity is not, for any men, merely the schooling of fear and self-interest. By adversity they find their true selves. There can be no belief in good without the belief that the folly and insolence and devilry of men are purged away by the calamities which they bring. The Christian world has escaped from the old doctrine of

Nemesis to this other and happier doctrine of a punishment that is not mere revenge but the justice and kindness of God to men of free will, the means by which He leads them to their true selves and to that true will of theirs which is not appetite or madness. In that belief is the hope of the world, which must also be a hope for Germany.

There is one other thing that needs saying. Even to an enemy that has laughed at the word honour we must give honour where it is due. History, when it passes judgment on the operations of the war, will pay a high tribute to the fighting of the German Army in this last month. Without hope, without even the stay of a good cause, without breathing space between attacks that daily grew stronger, without love of their leaders and rulers, they have kept one thing—their discipline. Long ago the army lost its honour, but even to the last it did not lose its courage. It is vain to talk of cannon-fodder and human machines; we belittle our own soldiers by thus belittling their enemy. Behind their discipline and their docility, and all the other mechanical qualities of the German Army, there must remain something of the spirit; they must love their country still, through evil report as through good, for richer for poorer, for better for worse. And in that love, now proved to be positive as well as negative, proved to be no mere envy and hatred of others, is Germany's hope for the future and our hope for her. That which has given her courage in despair may give her also wisdom. For the source of both is love.

Her task now is to see herself as she is, to tell no more lies either to herself or to

others. Full repentance cannot be expected to come in a moment; but if behind the monstrous idol of the past there remain a real Germany, if in every German beyond his appetities and vainglory and pedantry and fear there is a real self to be found in this moment of adversity, then, with the finding of that real self, there will come repentance. Then the Germans will find joy, the only joy left to them for the moment, in telling themselves the truth. They will say to the world, "We have sinned before God and against thee and are no more worthy to be called thy children." And when that happens, when they have acknowledged the justice of our compulsion upon them to undo as best they can all the wrongs they have done, then it will be for us to play our part in the Divine parable. And already it is our duty to say and do nothing that will hinder their repentance. If we are insolent in triumph now, we shall be forgetting already that it is not we who have triumphed, but the moral law that has made us its instruments for the righting of wrong and the salvation of the wrong-doer. To be the instrument of the moral law is the highest destiny of any man or nation, but at any moment either may be false to it. Now comes the moment when we lay the weapons of God aside; but we are not therefore discharged from the army of God to our own devices. All those who have died in His service have not died so that we may plume ourselves on the victory they won. For us they have died in vain unless we make for them a sanctuary in our own minds, purifying them of all base thoughts that would be an insult to the presence and memory of the dead.—*The Times, London.*